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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UNFICYP](#) [EUN](#) [TU](#) [CY](#)
SUBJECT: ERDOGAN IN CYPRUS: FIRST, DO NO HARM

REF: A. NICOSIA 1088
[1](#)B. LIBBY-SILLIMAN EMAIL (7/11/2006)

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald L. Schlicher, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This is an action request. See paragraph 5.

[1](#)1. (C) Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan's planned July 20 visit to the "TRNC" comes at a potentially awkward moment, given the just-concluded Gambari agreement (ref a) and the looming likelihood of a Cyprus-related crisis between the EU and Turkey over accession this fall. The official purpose of the visit is to participate in celebrations marking the 32nd anniversary of the 1974 "Peace Operation" (he will also open a school and sign a financial aid protocol) but because this is Erdogan's first Cyprus trip as prime minister, his presence on the island takes on an added symbolic significance.

[1](#)2. (C) From our perspective, and that of our Turkish Cypriot contacts, Erdogan's visit seems intended as a gesture to protect his nationalist flank at home by demonstrating solidarity with the "TRNC." Fresh pictures of Erdogan, standing shoulder to shoulder with military brass, Rauf Denktash, and the "TRNC" cabinet as fighters fly overhead, may indeed help Erdogan at home. But they could place Turkish Cypriot leader Talat in an awkward position by feeding the suspicions of Greek Cypriots and others that he is fully subordinate to Ankara -- at the very moment he needs to be seen as a credible interlocutor who can deliver in upcoming UN-brokered talks.

[1](#)3. (C) Yet, some good could come of Erdogan's visit if he uses the opportunity to express unequivocal support both for Talat and for the upcoming UN-brokered process. Sources close to Talat tell us that they have gotten some "mixed signals" from Ankara (ref b) about the Gambari process. Talat is aware that he has angered some on the mainland by agreeing to a joint statement that did not mention the Annan Plan and "gave into Greek Cypriot demands" to discuss both substance and day-to-day matters. The Turkish Cypriot leadership took nervous note of Namik Tan's remarks about the Gambari visit, which was spun in the local press as "Turkey does not support the technical talks." Talat plans to use his time with Erdogan to "explain" the Gambari agreement to the Turkish PM; the Turkish Cypriots' number-one deliverable for the visit will be to ensure Erdogan's support of both the agreement and the man who negotiated it.

[1](#)4. (C) In addition to using his visit to reinforce Talat's position in Cyprus talks, Erdogan could do himself a world of good with the Europeans by avoiding harsh rhetoric about ports and planes. This may require some intestinal fortitude; both nationalists at home and Turkish Cypriots here will no doubt be anxious to hear, once again, that the GOT is not planning to "abandon" the Turkish Cypriots. But the GOT's tired, give-no-quarter soundbites on this issue

play right into the hands of Greek Cypriot hard-liners and crypto-opponents of Turkey's EU-accession process, who would like to see Papadopoulos stick it to Turkey this fall. Resident European ambassadors will be watching Erdogan's visit closely; he needs to give Turkey's beleaguered friends in the EU something to work with.

15. (C) Post requests that the Department and Embassy Ankara approach the GOT (at both the AKP/political and technocratic levels), to reinforce this message. Erdogan's visit to Cyprus should be used to bolster Talat, support the UN process, and do no harm with the EU.
SCHLICHER